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ABSTRACT

This document discusses some policy issues in British higher education. Section 1 covers the expanding concept of higher education. Section 2 discusses various objectives in higher education including competence; acquisition of skills for servicing the community; enjoyment; exploration of a field of knowledge for its own sake; critical awareness and commitment; and knowledge, empathy, and research. Section 3 emphasizes the advantages and disadvantages of the binary system. Section 4 reviews the dilemma of costs. Section 5 presents means to implement the objectives. Emphasis is placed on the diploma of higher education, the unit system, new courses, techniques for learning, the open university, higher education and other forms of experience, and the creation of a think-tank on higher education. (MJM)

SOME POLICY ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Group Report

February 1974

CONTENTS

PRELIMINARY

1. Our first Report (January 1971) had a wide circulation in Britain. It confined its attention largely to questions we thought to be of urgent importance in higher education over a period of increasing monetary constraint — the organisation of higher education and of entry to it; the interrelation of courses within it; and problems of financing it. In this first Report we put forward a number of proposals which seemed to us important at the time and which many of us still think important. We were strongly against any diminution of opportunities for entering higher education and urged that full recognition should be given to the experience and qualifications of potential students who had been in employment since leaving school. We wanted those who entered employment at that stage to be assured of their right to transfer to full-time higher education later on. We believed that fewer students should follow narrowly academic honours courses or courses qualifying them for highly specialised professions. The emphasis, we thought, should be on entry to an institution, the choice of a particular course within it being confirmed only after a student had already joined the institution. Transfer to another course ought to be readily possible in the same institution, or in another, credit being given for the work actually done. We were strongly in favour of two-year courses being available at places of higher education, with students entitled to return later for a third full-time year with a resumption of grant. In general we wanted much more flexible and varied arrangements within our higher education system — which we viewed as essentially one, whatever the organisational differences between the parts. We argued that closer relationships between the two parts of the binary system ought to bring financial benefits with them.

2. This first Report, a few of whose suggestions we have indicated, has been a background document for the thinking which has gone on since then both in the Group — whose membership is given in Appendix I — and in two Working Parties (see Appendix II), each of which has met some 15 times.

3. Our effort during the period since the first Report was issued has been:

   (i) to take into account some of the new factors making themselves apparent in recent developments in higher education in this country;

   (ii) to reflect upon the overall objectives of higher education and upon the relationship between those objectives and the structure of the system;

   (iii) to deduce some of the consequences, as we see them, for the development of higher education in Britain later in the century.

4. This paper has been written on behalf of the Group and where the word 'we' appears it is intended to mean the Group as a whole. But though participants in the Group are in general agreement with the lines it follows, they are not to be held individually as necessarily endorsing every sentence or paragraph in it.

SECTION I

An Expanding Concept of Higher Education

5. Among the outstanding social phenomena of our time in many countries is a continuing, widely-expressed public desire for higher education, matched by official recognition of its importance. A broadening band of people want it either for themselves or for their children. Though there will be temporary fluctuations in the demand, there is continuing expectation that by early in the eighties there will be more than 900,000 students, part-time and full-time, in higher education in Britain, including those in the Open University. Without attempting to explore fully the manifold social reasons which lie behind this public desire, we list a few of the reasons why public opinion and government policy should be committed to expansion.

   (i) There is much evidence to show that the more a secondary education system expands the greater the demand to be satisfied for a period of tertiary education to follow it, either immediately or after an interval.

   (ii) The increasing complexity of the mechanisms used, and services needed, by our society takes greater and more educated skills to manage it.

   (iii) Basic research is of indispensable importance to the future. Many places of higher education should also be centres of research.

   (iv) The pursuit and enjoyment of intellectual and cultural activities is a worthwhile end in itself.

   (v) It is increasingly important that in our highly organised society professionalism should not be taken on trust. A period of higher education, adequate in its content, should help people to balance with greater perception the relative importance of one expertise or way of life against another.

   (vi) The assumption that the invention of more and more devices to increase consumption is a self-evident, sufficient purpose in society ought to be critically examined and the value system it employs put to question. To do this should be one of the tasks of higher education today. Without such questioning, an endless chase for a spurious progress could ensue.

6. We begin to detect, in addition to the accepted expansion in numbers, the growth also of an expanding concept of higher education. Whereas two generations ago higher education could be fairly adequately described as education from c. 18 to c. 22 (disregarding a handful of 'mature' students) for a highly selected sector of the age-group, it is now breaking out from this definition, with regard both to age-range and narrowness of selection. With regard to age, the idea of higher education as broadly education for the 18-plus citizen with no end-stop is beginning to take on: for an adult to 'go to school' (in the American phrase) at any stage is not yet seen as quite natural in Britain, but increasingly may become so, especially through the Open University. This raises questions of how far we shift our provision of resources from a concentration on the 18-22 group to a wider spread of opportunity throughout adult life.

7. The widening concept of higher education highlights its social role. The opening of its gates to far wider ranges of people, the new concern of the tax-payer about the institutions he pays for, the rising demand for recurrent or permanent education, the part to be played by students in society, the responsibility of experts (particularly scientists) for the environment — all these are factors which show the close relationship between the activities of higher education and the goals and values of our society.

8. The relationship should be fruitful, but too often public thinking about objectives is inadequate. Statements on policies in higher education tend to be too superficial in awareness of the presuppositions they embody and of their long-term consequences. Some of these inadequacies can be readily exemplified:

(i) There have been few attempts to make a searching analysis of student unrest and its fundamental causes. which have an international, not simply a national, connotation. Surface irritations at stupid, incoherent or bizarre expressions of their discontents have largely blocked the way to a perceptive and sympathetic reading of the 'signs' which are being given to the older generation in student protests. Fundamentally it is not perversity but a deep-rooted questioning of social and educational aims which motivates them. While some of their attitudes will persist, whatever is done, others indicate (in however mild a way) deficiencies in our system which could be remedied. Their complaints of training that is too specialised or 'irrelevant' are not, in the main, receiving the examination they deserve. It is dangerous for the older generations to brush these aside because students cannot frame adequate cures.

(ii) The problem of student attitudes highlights a fundamental issue of which few people outside the institutions themselves seem to be aware: the function of higher education as a stimulus to responsible criticism of existing social objectives, structures and habits. The tax-payer naturally wants his money spent on the efficient servicing of his society and the increase of its economic productivity. He tends to assume that this is best done by maintaining orderly establishments and wasting little time in asking where the community is going or in building utopias. But, as our previous point implies, society is never static and its movement therefore must be controlled by a responsible critique, if it is not to become a runaway bus. Institutions of higher education are places of excellence where training in the art of informed, responsible and perceptive criticism of society ought to take place. This critical function is as important to the community as the more obvious servicing roles, yet commonly this activity is not recognised or provided for.

(iii) One of the inhibitions which arise as soon as we talk in terms of criticising present social goals and formulating future ones is that such criticism clearly involves value judgements. We have no common set of values, it is contended, and therefore must avoid at all costs mixing any such controversial matter in the purveyance of 'hard', aseptic knowledge which is the function of higher education. Moreover, it is said, any design to 'educate students in values' partakes of propaganda and the attempt to bind them to a past value

system, instead of leaving them free to formulate their own. The main answer to this last type of argument, namely, that no purveyance of knowledge is ever in fact value free, is a truism, yet however much the myth of pure objectivity is theoretically repudiated, it is often assumed in educational practice. On the dilemma caused by the plurality of values in Britain it can be said that, though systems of belief are truly plural, there are many more commonly shared values about meaning and quality in human life than are normally recognised. Integrity and the quest for truth are two of them. Giving service is another. In any case, the need is not for education in a specific set of values, but the opening up for examination of a range of alternative value systems, whose attractiveness can be seen, as well as the critical consideration of the values implicit in the educational process itself.

9. On another level, the impact of economic factors can stultify the growth of higher education. Escalating costs accentuate both the wish and the need for economies in the field of higher education. These can profoundly affect its purpose and quality; they can mould it into new shapes without an expression of conscious intention on anybody's part. There is, for example, official pressure for more part-time students, shorter courses, residence at home, more 'efficient' teaching methods, lower staffing ratios. It is not contended that any one of these is necessarily per se educationally retrogressive. Fitting into the first three of those conditions might best suit the educational needs of some students at a particular moment, but there is a difference between weighing the educational consequences of such conditions and seizing on them as devices by which to economise. Two further respects in which economies may call the tune sharply, and to the detriment of education, are the tendency (a) for the university sector to become more isolated from the rest and (b) to ensure that research is more strongly customer-oriented.

SECTION II

Objectives in Higher Education

10. In discussing the interaction between the goals of society and the activities of higher education we have implied that higher education itself must have certain distinctive objectives — though we do not in the least wish to imply that they are exclusive to it. We want now to explore briefly three of these in particular. In stating them the choice of words has presented a problem, since no two people would be likely to use the same terms in delineating broad purposes. While the drafters must bear responsibility for the actual language used here, there is general agreement on the main ideas expressed. No hierarchy of values or order of priority is implied in our order and it will be obvious that they are closely inter-related in both thought and experience.

Competence : acquisition of skills for servicing the community

11. The need of the community for a steady and sufficient flow of trained people competent and ready to fulfil the multifarious and proliferating specialised functions of a technological society is undeniable. In the implementation of

this obvious and widely recognised objective there are two aspects we wish to emphasise :

(i) A specialised function in society does not necessarily require a narrowly specialised training. Education which will service the community should be viewed as education for assuming — and changing -- later specialised roles, rather than training in specific ones.

(ii) The mastery of techniques and knowledge which enable people to serve society in a significant capacity is itself an aspect of personal education. It is a simple but important truth that the application of talents to useful ends and the recognition of that usefulness by a community are factors in building up not only the stability and happiness, but also the imaginative potential, of human beings. The mastery of a tool or technique by rational means can be an exciting and stimulating personal achievement, not the desiccation of spirit it is sometimes assumed to be. The recognition of this element should influence the approach to professional training and the kind of education given in it.

Enjoyment: exploration of a field of knowledge for its own sake

12. The word enjoyment has many depths of meaning; it is used here to denote that imaginative response which is a creative element in the study of all sciences, arts and technologies.

13. The continuing vitality of individuals and communities depends in part at least on the continuing exploration of the world of nature and of man, both past and present. For the individual student this exploration is in part covering known territory, although 'leading students to the frontier of knowledge' is not a happy metaphor, since long before they have officially reached it, some, at least, will be making new discoveries. The essence of exploration is the assimilating of new experiences and new data of all kinds. The true objective here is not that of furnishing students with packets of information which they 'ought to know' but drawing them into a wider world with an intrinsic worth of its own. For people grow by enlarging the range of their experiences — by entering into what is other than themselves, while the community benefits thereby through the qualities thus nourished or released. Our call therefore is for more attention to the development and transmission of the techniques of imaginative discovery rather than to the results of discovery. There is a world of difference between teaching students how to solve problems when they know that the answer is given at the back of the book and teaching them how to start thinking about problems where there is no guarantee that the answer is known. The task is to engender a sense of 'openness', together with the confidence to work ahead, even though you are not sure of getting to the end. A mature teacher, by disclosing something of his own imaginative processes, can often elicit a response in the minds of students whose powers of enquiry and creative synthesis are still dormant.

14. This emphasis on experience — a 'personalising' of knowledge in some way — implies a new approach to the concept of objectivity. It is often assumed that

the 'pure' pursuit of knowledge for its own sake must start from a position of detachment, with a conscious exclusion of personal feelings. On the contrary, much of the most creative intellectual activity starts from a relationship of attachment, of a subtle personal involvement in the subject. This insight has not been applied to higher education consciously enough, although, of course, many teachers operate under its influence. The time has come when we should scrutinise this accepted aim of so-called objectivity or dispassionate enquiry as a goal in higher education. The subjective element of attachment must be made explicit — indeed, teaching would be enriched by 'declaration of interest' — yet there is an important truth within the idea of objectivity to which teachers in both universities and polytechnics must even at high cost remain loyal. If personal attachment is the beginning of fruitful academic study, objectivity, in the sense of an intention to know a thing as fully as possible for what it is, is the goal of all intellectual exploration, even if never completely attainable. Thus aspiration towards objectivity in this sense is of crucial importance in personal education, since it is the force which dissolves prejudices, bursts apart ideological frameworks, modifies judgements in the light of new data, and compels the rethinking of one's philosophy of life under the stimulus of new insights. The reception of that which is new is difficult and painful and perhaps always involves some cutting to fit the space available for it. This second objective could thus be summed up as a combination of personal attachment to inspire the effort, with objective vision to illuminate the conclusion.

Critical awareness and commitment

15. The third objective must be to provide opportunity and encouragement for the assessment of experience, the examination of values and the formation of commitments. It will be observed, in so far as scrutiny implies a moment of detachment, that this third objective stands in some sort of tension to the second. There are, in the first place, many implications of values intertwined in the assumptions behind professional training: for example, the role of the expert in relation to the ordinary citizen in determining social ends and solving social problems, the responsible and irresponsible uses of power acquired through expertise, the functions of technology as the servant or the master of communities, the relation of men to their environment. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that critical attitudes must be based on some understanding of how society and the economy really work. Secondly, the activity of exploration for its own sake enlarges these questions into concern with the nature of man, the meaning of imagination and intuition in life, the meaning of compassion and of aspiration. Thirdly, as an individual making choices, every student needs to assimilate insights into his personal life and relationships, in order to fashion some coherent, albeit experimental, beliefs on which to base working commitments and loyalties, whether in the field of politics, morals, religion or whatever.

16. It is of the essence of this process that any final synthesis is personal and free from open pressures to conform to any sort of orthodoxy — though 'hidden persuaders' can never be eliminated. But it is also of the essence of a personal philosophy that it is reached through encounter, that is, through meetings of minds (and more than minds) in living discourse. The sparks that

fly in frank discussion often ignite the spirit. These encounters, of course, happen anywhere, but within the context of higher education they have an especially high potential because the range of knowledge and ideas can provide so rich a nourishment to thought and emotion. They can take place with contemporaries or older academics, informally or formally, personally or impersonally. The essential condition is an intention of all parties to listen 'openly', to seek understanding before criticising, to be willing to declare their own commitments in doing so.

Knowledge, empathy and research

17. All the foregoing elements play their part in creating that fertile seedbed from which spring the new ideas and insights, the intuitions which lead to new knowledge, the researches, inventions, creations which the community needs. It is a mistake to view 'research' in isolation from the general educative aims of higher education. Techniques of mastery, learnt through professional training, are obviously essential to the researcher, but equally the stimulus to curiosity, the perceptions of imaginative experience, the crystallising of personal aims and commitments, all go to the making of fruitful research. And it is developments in new knowledge, not the sterile piling up of data, that feed the springs of vitality in a community. While there is clearly a place for research commissioned to meet present social needs, the intuitive inspirations which lead to long-term benefits must grow at will from the seedbed, as the story of many great scientists has shown. The main objective in higher education in this respect should be to provide the soil, rather than choosing all the plants.

18. It should be apparent from the foregoing analysis of objectives that the interests of the individual and the community are inextricably mingled, though they can, of course, at times be in conflict. It is misleading to make the common distinctions between vocational and non-vocational, professional and personal education. The balance sheet of cost and gain to the community cannot, in fact, be drawn up. But if, on the one hand, this is something the tax-payer has to accept, on the other, the student has to realise that preparation for a function in society is a meaningful part of his whole education.

SECTION III

The Advantages and Disadvantages of the Binary System

19. It should be apparent that, educationally speaking, all these purposes should be operative in all types of institution and course, though in differing emphases. To attempt to differentiate in objectives between the autonomous and the public sectors of higher education is damaging to both sides, since it misrepresents what actually goes on. It would be nonsense, for instance, to maintain that universities had no concern to promote 'usefulness' in their students, nor polytechnics and technical colleges to stimulate cultural interests. In terms of broad educational objectives the dichotomy has little validity.

20. Nevertheless there were many reasons for a formalisation of the binary system in the second half of the 1960's. They included the manifest need of the country for a greater proportion of intelligent, technically educated people; lack of

confidence that the universities would be capable of producing them; a realisation that more and closer contacts were needed between higher education and productive industry, and, indeed, society itself in many of its contemporary manifestations. But in addition there was a certain impatience, not without cause, on the part of some sections of public and governmental opinion with the uncontrollability of universities, their unwillingness not merely to toe lines but to see what others saw as the lines to be toed. It was thought that through rather more direct control of the public sector by the authorities of government, local and central, the provision of the right numbers and kinds of personnel for certain essential functions might be ensured. On the other side of the binary line, the universities could remain less immediately responsible functionally and more 'élitist', with greater freedom and more resources for long-term research.

21. While recognising some justification for and weight in this line of reasoning, we are of the opinion that the present disjuncture in our higher education system could lead to a sharp division between utilitarian and non-utilitarian education at this level which would break with the British tradition. By their history and from their origin in the medieval period, universities have been vocational institutions as well as places of intellectual speculation and enquiry. A medical school was an important element in most of our nineteenth-century universities and the nucleus round which some of them grew. Their departments of applied science have been among their most rapidly developing parts in our own century. It is true that the rise of technical and technological education following the industrial revolution led to a new range of specifically vocational institutions. But these, in seeking to promote literacy and numeracy, took for granted, at their best, other formative educational influences, especially among their abler students. One of our basic educational assumptions has been that 'character-training' goes on side by side with the acquisition of skills. In fact, in the education of most people, the higher the level it reaches, the more subtly interwoven are the vocational and non-vocational elements in it. And each is able to fertilise the other.

22. Though their final educational goals cannot be distinguished, the routes to attainment can be different in each sector. Each side of the binary line represents a different spectrum of activity, but all is within a single continuum. In the public sector the route may be through an early appeal to practical situations and the world of work — though even here it is not safe to generalise, for most of the technological universities avow a similar commitment. Thus even in approach and method the differences must not be over-emphasised. Engineers, social scientists, teachers and many other professionals will and should be educated on both sides of the line. Whichever side they come from, they will need to be educated responsibly — that is, to face all the facts that adults need to face. In polytechnics as in universities students must acquire the ability to challenge existing ideas, whether in technology or elsewhere, and to produce new ones. The more advanced the education given, the more clearly must the common objective be to develop this capacity to think for themselves, while respecting evidence, and to accept that what is reasonable and excellent may be more socially or morally important in the long run than what is immediately useful. University and polytechnic share the common task of conveying a sense of relative values which they hope will become an attribute of at least some students. Each has to acknowledge a loyalty to something more than the dictates, even at times the wishes, of the State,

and each should recognise in this matter its fundamental kinship with the other.

23. In short, if these common objectives exist throughout higher education, it is of vital importance that the functions of universities and polytechnics should be seen as related and corresponding, though with distinctive and distinguishing features. To draw too hard a line between the two sectors will inhibit a consideration of higher education as a whole. It might, in effect, mean that the universities were pushed in the direction of the myth which identifies them with ivory towers, while polytechnics were pushed towards the opposite myth which identifies them wholly with utilitarian functions. These are wrong and outdated images. In the polytechnics — itself now a misleading word to describe what they are becoming — the overall ratio of students taking courses in the arts and social sciences as compared with courses in the pure sciences and technology is today about the same as in the universities and it is tending to go further in an arts direction. Polytechnics and universities need closer contacts; both types of institution need to develop more non-traditional courses, both need to achieve a closer relation between the scientific and the non-scientific subjects they teach.

24. In our view there is a particular need for universities today to read the signs of the times correctly and look ahead to the future. They are at present, no doubt, still in a position of great power, with their chances of selecting students of high intelligence, their outstanding research capacity and their international outlook. But they need to see the future anew and themselves in a wider context. The universities can at present be seen as the privileged sector, with their favoured relationship to the government through the U.G.C., their greater amenities, their relative academic freedom, the status and prestige of their staff. But if their value as servicing institutions is greatly reduced by the growth and influence of the public sector, they could become a dwindling élite on the periphery of society, cut off from much of contemporary life and with a lessening impact on it. For them to drift into the position of being little enclaves of scholarship would be a disaster, not only for them, but also for the nation: for the universities, because out-of-touchness spells sterility; for the nation, because intellectual vitality, from whatever source, is its life-blood.

25. Thus it is essential that universities establish communications with the polytechnics that will stand the test. The forces driving universities and polytechnics towards interlocking relationships are powerful, and not to be denied unless there is a deliberate policy of blockage on the part of university staffs. If there is truth in the view that a factor in the development of the polytechnics was insufficient social responsiveness in the universities, the point must be taken, and a new positive attitude towards the public sector be built up.

26. The sixties saw a spectacular expansion in universities, during which they managed in addition to take on considerable responsibilities in relation to the also expanding colleges of education. Perhaps indeed the most notable example of 'comprehensivisation' in British higher education during this century was the establishment, following the publication of the McNair Report in 1944, of Institutes and Schools of Education. By this, some 20 universities, each as the centre of an Area Training Organisation, took on considerable responsibility

for the work done by the Colleges of Education of their region. Inherent in the concept of Institutes of Education was the development, over a period of years, of more intimate relationships between colleges and universities, with the colleges not regarded simply as dependent satellites. Such a development was for various reasons slow in maturing. The policy enunciated in the White Paper, Education: A Framework for Expansion (1972) removes the A.T.O. element from Institutes, and many former colleges of education will be joining the public part of the binary system, having weighed the arguments in favour of doing so. This in itself could diminish the potential comprehensiveness of a number of universities; the seventies might become the decade in which administrative policies seek explicitly or implicitly to neuter and neutralise the universities. Energetic steps need to be taken to establish a closer partnership between the autonomous and the public sectors in serving the nation's needs for higher education. There is much to be said, thus, for colleges which for good reasons join the public sector maintaining firm links with universities too. Some will look to them for validation of the qualifications for which their students work; others as conspicuous sources, along with polytechnics, for the external examiners they employ.

27. One of the supposed privileges of the universities is generally assumed to be their greater autonomy. But this cannot matter much without its proper concomitant: a real impact on society outside themselves in terms both of ideas and of critical judgements. Autonomy can become a useless possession. In any case, it is difficult to see why the institutions in the public sector should in any essential way be different in this respect. All higher education must be related in significant ways to the community and its needs; all higher education requires comparative freedom in which to develop the qualities of vitality and critical sense which we have emphasised. The question of the right degree of autonomy which is required to do this work properly is a problem of the same order for all institutions of higher education. Such decisions have to be beaten out in new terms today, with universities and the other institutions of higher education working on these problems in cooperation with each other.

28. Against the background of the foregoing argument we must attempt to grasp the prickly nettle of standards. Is a sharp line to be drawn between higher and further education? The need for clear academic criteria is felt strongly throughout higher education. Many members of staff in polytechnics and technical colleges as well as universities feel a great sense of responsibility for adult education in general and this is reinforced by the concept now rapidly gaining ground of education permanente. We certainly need to widen our definitions of academic criteria, yet it still seems necessary to point out some distinguishing characteristics of 'higher' courses and performance. Perhaps we may say that the characteristics of a higher education course where pursued intra-murally or extra-murally are (a) the requirement of a sustained effort over a considerable period, (b) coherence in the course as a structured intellectual progression, (c) a concern with intellectual foundations rather than the quick acquisition of techniques, (d) a study of areas or topics in sufficient depth to enable students where possible to get behind the authorities. But of course it is entirely right that there should be a great variety of longer or shorter courses available in adult education which are not bound by these criteria, both for leisure-time programmes and for the short-term goal of acquiring a particular skill.

29. If, however, we try to draw a firm line between 'higher' and 'other' adult education we are at once aware how difficult it is to do so. The spectrum is continuous and the attempt to define a cut-off point between 'higher' and 'other' could be dangerously unfair. That there is an intellectual hierarchy in learning it would be hypocritical to deny. The recognition of differences of this order is, after all, a fact of life. The problem is that the genuine intellectual differentiation is too often associated with a spurious social and economic hierarchy which generates charges (often justified) of intellectual snobbery. Moreover, the fact that the formal distinction between 'higher' and 'other' is likely to remain, the granting of a degree or higher diploma will confuse, even bedevil, our thinking until such pieces of paper cease to be regarded as passports to 'better' jobs and 'better' living. If we can, however, momentarily clear this adventitious element out of our thinking, the educational problem on which we should focus in shaping our attitudes and thence our policies is how to maintain a tension between 'exclusive' and 'inclusive' aims in educating the over-eighteens. To seek to educate expertise alone, whether intellectual or technical, is not enough. The evaluation essential for maintaining excellence has to be combined with a much broader encouragement of educational activity at a variety of levels. In the past many University Extension lecturers have done this quite naturally. Technical college lecturers have always had to adjust teaching to a broad band of ability. The offerings made by the Open University are now a model whose initial successes must at least make traditionally-minded academics pause for thought. In the future, we believe, higher education as a whole will need to have a broader range of view while maintaining its capacity to scale heights.

SECTION IV

The Dilemma of Costs

30. It will be evident from the foregoing argument that we support a continuing expansion of higher education: the long-term national aim should be a greater variety of students, from a broader age-band, taking a wider range of subjects. We have stressed in this Report the importance of thinking further into the basic purposes of higher education, for it is a manifest nonsense to put money into developments whose objectives are obscure or too limited. But the hard constricting realities of scarce material resources impose another kind of imperative and we must face squarely the fact that any kind of expansion — even any continuation of the present position — will take a mounting proportion of national resources. Expansion without saving of some kind would almost certainly carry national expenditure to levels unacceptable to the tax-payer. The alternatives are expansion with savings, or a static, even retrogressive, policy at present levels of spending. We strongly support the former; that is, we believe that the developments we wish to see must be as economically tailored as is consistent with the realisation of our objectives.

31. We believe that economies in teaching costs can be made of a kind that will not materially affect quality. Later in this Report (para. 49) we suggest a use of the mass media which could make possible economies in academic staff time without ill effects on teaching. Developments in educational technology and resource management may within the next decade make it possible to reduce the amount of duplication which results from each institution doing

everything for itself. Some reduction in the staff/student ratio would also not seem unreasonable but any sudden or drastic change would be disastrous and we should oppose it. An average reduction of, say, 15 per cent in higher education as a whole should be tolerable over a ten-year period of the expansion that is contemplated, but it should be carefully planned so that poorly-staffed departments and institutions do not suffer, and so that staff numbers continue to grow at a reasonable rate during this period. This would save something of the order of £60m in 1983.

32. Our most important — perhaps controversial — suggestion is that expansion in higher education should be partly financed from ex-student contributions. In our Interim Report we proposed a loan scheme which aimed at achieving some degree of social justice in relation to the privileges conferred by higher education. The tax-payers now provide each student during a three-year course with services and maintenance worth on average some £4000. The potential entrant to higher education would in any case have a higher lifetime income than the average wage-earner. To this a student's education adds a further source of earning power: while it perhaps makes him more socially productive, he himself receives a large share of the resulting increase in the social product. The lifetime income of a graduate, even allowing for the fact that he has spent fewer years earning, is just about double that of somebody who has fewer than four O levels. Thus the people with higher earning potential are being subsidised to an unrealised degree by the generality of tax-payers. Of course graduates pay more in taxes than they would if they had not received higher education, but these tax payments come later in time than the subsidy and must therefore be reduced by a discount factor before they can be compared with it. When this is done the extra taxes are found to be much smaller than the subsidy. The subsidy of an undergraduate student per year is well over half the annual wage of a manual worker. So the overall process is a significant source of income inequality, transferring wealth from the poorer to the richer. The case for a contribution from ex-students is therefore grounded in equity.

33. We would certainly not wish to support an outright loan scheme, since we are in principle opposed to any financial arrangements which, by requiring payments from students, even if deferred, would act as a deterrent to entry into higher education. We favour a scheme whereby outright maintenance grants would continue, thus preserving some differential support to students from poorer homes. But, since the real value of the grant will be eroded by inflation, this would be topped up by a conditional grant at a level chosen (within limits) by the student. For each further £100 of grant a student took out, he would pay back later a prearranged percentage of his income via the Inland Revenue until he had repaid the £100 plus the appropriate interest. For the scheme to be self-balancing at a real rate of interest of five per cent per annum, with repayment spread on average over twenty years, about one-third of one per cent of the graduate's total income would need to be paid each year, that is, a conditional grant of £300 would result in the alienation of only one per cent of future annual income over twenty years. The scheme would be easily operated through the Inland Revenue and the relief to public funds would soon build up to a substantial level.

34. Two points perhaps need to be stressed: first, that the loan element in this scheme only applies to the maintenance grant, since, although logically it

should also apply to tuition fees, we believe that in practice it is politically unacceptable in this country to charge fees for tuition; secondly, we must underline the point that until or unless the graduate worker's income reached a certain predetermined level, no repayment would be made.

35. Since we first proposed such a scheme in our Interim Report it has become, we submit, even more relevant, for two reasons in particular. First, inflation has produced a situation in which it is becoming clear that the public is not willing to maintain students at a standard of living generally regarded as 'decent'. They are becoming impoverished and their standard of living is falling rapidly while that of the rest of the community is not. This is a stupid situation — miserable for them and productive of political instability. There should, therefore, be some kind of system whereby students can adjust their standard according to the general trend of living standards without putting too great a burden on the rest of the community. Moreover some sections of the community, including some of the students themselves, have become increasingly sensitive on questions of income distribution. The climate of opinion makes a proposal of this kind more acceptable to public opinion. Secondly, the question of extending more generous opportunities in higher education to older people is now coming to the fore. It is highly desirable that there should be larger numbers of people studying in their thirties or upwards. But this will never happen unless there is a system of public financial support for these people, since employers, who now want a higher degree of mobility of labour, cannot be expected to shoulder the burden for as much re-education as there ought to be. On the other hand, tax-payers are not going to be willing to give grants at the level of c. £2000 or more per annum necessary for a student in his or her thirties. This kind of expansion will never happen unless we institute some kind of loan scheme where really large sums are available to people.

36. The present distinction between the mandatory and the discretionary sectors generates increasing tension. The stress could be taken out of this if people could choose their own level of financing. This is consistent with the general philosophy that there should be a degree of impersonality in social arrangements, enabling people to make their own choices on stated terms. The aim of minimising the element of bureaucratic determination and maximising the element of personal self-determination is very much in keeping with the trend of opinion among young people today.

37. Higher education already consumes a fraction of the total educational budget which some would regard as excessive, and expansion of higher education on the scale we hope to see would greatly strengthen these criticisms. The choice may be between, on the one hand, continuation of the present grant system, with a less than desirable number entering, and, on the other, some contribution from the student but more entrants to higher education. We therefore consider it prudent to suggest for discussion a student partial loan scheme which at least has the important merits, first, of avoiding perpetual troubles from non-payment of parental contributions, secondly, of safeguarding students from becoming an increasingly underprivileged group and thirdly of improving relations between the student body and the rest of the community.

SECTION V

The Implementation of Objectives : Some Strategies and Structures

38. The objectives which we have set out are in essentials the same for all students in higher education : all should be involved in learning how to serve the community, to explore the world, to formulate their own values. Taking, then, an overall view, we wish now to discuss and evaluate certain new methods and other developments in relation to the objectives we have set out.

The Diploma of Higher Education

39. There are numbers of men and women who feel that the courses of higher education at present on offer are not those they particularly want to follow — even though they may in fact be taking them. But they will only want to take any course, however interesting or relevant, if they are rewarded, when they have satisfactorily completed it, with a qualification that matters. A new two-year qualification, such as a Diploma of Higher Education, must, if it is to be reputable, have sound academic standards built into it. On the other hand, unless in content and/or structure it breaks fresh ground, there is little justification for instituting it. The problem is to introduce two years of study which will be readily acceptable as the first two years of a first degree course and which at the same time will lead to a qualification which is welcomed by perceptive employers. It needs to give employers some guarantee that those who take it are likely to be more lively and receptive of mind and more fitted for further education of a professional sort than those who do not.

40. If the Diploma of Higher Education is to be a new sort of qualification, to provide it adequately will be a probing test both of universities and of polytechnics. One danger ahead for universities is that they will be driven into remaining academically pure at a cost of not catering for more than a small fraction of the nation's need for well-educated minds. One danger for the polytechnics is that they will be driven into the position of making themselves unable to supply the nation with people who are lively in mind over a sufficient range, who are aware both of their own value judgements and of the reasons for those judgements. It will not be enough to provide a Diploma of Higher Education the content of which is virtually indistinguishable from that of the first two years of an orthodox degree course, of which it might in effect form Part I.

41. We accept that any Diploma of Higher Education should be built on a modular basis and that the modules comprising it should offer candidates a considerable variety of choices and combinations of choice, though we think that students should be limited in the numbers of combinations they can choose. We do not believe that it will be adequate for all the modules to be made up only of subjects hitherto considered orthodox either in university or polytechnic circles, though it has to be remembered that some universities have already accepted as subjects for B.Ed. degree work areas such as home economics; rural studies; movement studies; art and craft; drama. While a number of the subjects which students have to take for a Diploma of Higher Education should we think be of a conventional kind — e.g. modern history; pure mathematics; engineering drawing; meteorology; inorganic chemistry — others should be interdisciplinary in content. In some cases, however, students taking interdisciplinary

courses must be required to fulfil certain conditions in the subjects they have previously studied. Among such interdisciplinary fields might be urban studies; pollution studies; contemporary morals; motivation and discipline in education; industrial relations; etc. Candidates should not be ruled out from taking courses for one or perhaps two modules of a Diploma of Higher Education in one institution while taking the remainder in another. Those who gain a Diploma of Higher Education at sufficient standard should normally be allowed to proceed, whether at once or after an interval, with further work enabling them to take some higher qualification, whether a degree or some other qualification of a professional kind.

42. We are aware that our proposals might tend to have their effect upon what have hitherto been regarded as fixed boundaries around certain subjects in degree and other curricula. That might not be a bad thing provided that the standards of intelligence and application a student was required to bring to his studies remained high. Indeed higher standards than at present in some respects might with profit be insisted upon — e.g. in the writing of English, which in our view is too low in papers sometimes accepted as entitling their writers to high honours degrees whether from universities or the C.N.A.A.

The Unit System

43. Shorter courses, interrupted courses, transfers to different institutions are likely to become more common, in response both to new social patterns and changing student attitudes towards their education. The U.S.A. already experiences great student mobility and the unit system has developed, in part at least, to provide educational currency which the student can take with him at the end of any semester if he moves out and on. The coins have recognised values and can be presented at a wide range of institutions. The features of flexibility and transferability are attractive in this system, which is rapidly gaining support in this country. Among the impulses moving institutions of higher education in this direction are the increased mobility of our society; student pressure against authoritarianism and predetermined programmes; the increasing power of international example; the unit-like character of many C.N.A.A. degrees; the example set by the Open University in the structuring of its degrees, and by the University of London of its science degrees, on a unit basis; and the development in various universities and polytechnics of courses for diplomas of higher education and B.Ed. degrees of modular type. Traditionally, however, in the British academic system great value has been set on the continuity of a structured course — at least for Honours degrees. In this respect British practice has differed not only from the American but also from the German model, where student mobility has had a long history. Implicit in our concept no doubt is a certain degree of authoritarianism, in the sense that it has been taken for granted that the academics determined the overall structure of a course, however many alternatives were allowed within it, and that this was laid down beforehand. We need to give much more thorough thought to the extent to which the virtues of British academic education have depended upon this principle of structure and how far these can be retained in new models. Obviously the unit system can be made derisory if a free-for-all choice allows students to pick at random from the whole catalogue. If, however, the units are large enough 'bricks' and if these bricks can only be used in certain combinations and a certain order, structures which will stand can be built.

The important thing is that there should be a conscious evaluation of such new curriculum structures. It is imperative if universities and polytechnics between them are to cater for 17 per cent or more of the age-group that they should widen the scope of their educational concern, looking at their curricula and programmes differently from the way in which they might do this if it was only the top 4 or 5 per cent of the age-group with which they dealt.

44. We are concerned that the transition to a unit-based system in the structure of degrees may lead further away from that thorough-going examination of the undergraduate curriculum in general which we believe to be necessary. Many combinations of units may be too market dominated, or too much affected by the wishes of professional associations, or chosen because considerations of ease or convenience in arranging timetables are dominant.

45. We think that curriculum planning and development as affected by the transition to unit-based degrees should be made the major concern of a working party with members drawn from a variety of universities and polytechnics, who should collect evidence from all institutions of higher education in Britain regarding on-going trends in this area and study and report upon their significance. The effects of working to a system of units and credits should be carefully monitored over the next ten years in a variety of places of higher education and with students of a considerable range of ages and abilities. Critical thinking certainly needs to be done in this area and attention should be paid to the considerable work which has been done on curriculum planning outside Britain.

New Courses

46. One of the features of post-war academic development has been the attempt to 'redraw the map of knowledge' in new universities and in old, in traditional and in polytechnic institutions. There has been a noticeable shift towards courses calling themselves, to take one or two examples, European Studies, Integrated Science, Urban Studies — which try to bring subjects together in coherent wholes rather than collections of unrelated segments of knowledge. This is not mere pursuit of novelty. It represents a movement away from a compartmentalisation that in some respects had become a tyranny, and towards renewing the excitement of treading new paths and establishing new relationships. But the development of relations between disciplines creates its own difficulties. There is a delicate balance to be achieved between what must be learnt and what can be discovered at first-hand. The attraction which interdisciplinary courses have for students results to some extent from their quest for authentic first-hand personal experience and here their instincts are sound even if their schemes may be impracticable. Resistance comes, however, not only from considerations of impracticability, but also from a type of academic conservatism which masks determination to maintain an existing imperium. There is little doubt that many young men and women come from their schools into places of higher education with a much narrower and more specialist outlook than do the same proportion of students in say Sweden or the Netherlands. This is in part due to the fact that our secondary school system has not reflected the importance of more general interests — e.g. in matters of design, crisp self-expression in the mother tongue, consciousness of the existence of other nations with a language and an outlook as significant as our own. The fostering of an enlightened general outlook cannot in an age of mass higher education be left to the

mixing within colleges or halls or seminar groups as to a greater extent it possibly might with more justification have been in days when only an elite had a period of such education. The spread of interdisciplinary curricula marks an attempt, not as yet sufficiently thought-out or controlled, to provide the wider outlook necessary to educate men in a non-insular world in which it is much more difficult anyway to categorise subjects as simply chemistry, physics, economics, geography, ethics, but in which the necessary ways of knowing are to be developed without too much regard to barriers either within or between subjects.

There should be more pooling of information regarding new courses, especially of an interdisciplinary kind, and a serious attempt to compare and evaluate them. Stress must be laid on evaluation, for considerable differences of opinion still exist on the viability, even desirability, of such developments. These differences were reflected in the Group, where, on the one hand, the 'demise of the subject department' was forecast, while, on the other, the difficulty of 'synoptic mastery' of several disciplines for both teachers and students was stressed.

Techniques for learning

48. In the light of the objectives discussed above, there is room for a new scrutiny of traditional techniques for learning and teaching and for experiment in new ones. While their opposition to unseen written examinations is often based on questionable assumptions, the pressure of student critics for opportunities to work on projects, individual or group investigations, or research topics, and to present the results for final assessment, embodies a sound educational principle. Through such stimuli, a curiosity which is creative can be aroused and can generate, in some at least, the original ideas and inventions which the community needs. The formal examination is certainly an important educational instrument: at best its impact promotes ability to organise material quickly, the power to argue sharply and, in general, clarity and competence. At worst, it does none of these things, but stultifies individual thought by producing a weary concentration on learning enough facts to get through. It is often assumed that only the best students are capable of individual dissertations and traditionally the weaker the student the more it has been thought appropriate to give him a general course tested by unseen examination. But if we apply the objective of personal exploration to all students, then all must be encouraged to investigate some little bit of the field for themselves. A combination of examination work and dissertation or project report probably gives the best experience for most students. Methods of assessment cannot be treated separately from the preceding educational process, since they exercise an influence backwards on the whole higher education experience.

49. Techniques for using the mass media in higher education have been developing rapidly. These are often seen as necessary because more economical, but dangerous to the quality of education, a regrettable second best. There is reason for this view in the present, to us misdirected, trend of concentrating on mass teaching situations: a typical example is the use of video-tape recorders for reproducing 'canned lectures'. 'Covering the ground' has long been the objective of the mass lecture but the general emphasis in higher education is beginning to change from a concern with factual coverage – an obsession which

seems implicit in the older concept of 'audio-visual aids' — to a focus on understanding the basic structure of an academic discipline, and to the development of higher order skills, such as the ability to communicate, both verbally and in writing, to engage in conceptual analysis, to generate a creative solution to a problem and, above all, to assume autonomy for one's own learning. In this context the new media come into their own, offering new possibilities as resources for active learning by individuals and small groups, rather than passive learning in large groups. Furthermore, they encourage a clarification of the aims of particular learning activities and the conscious selection of the appropriate learning processes. We would therefore hope to see an increased interest in simple, flexible, 'take-home' learning resources, such as tape/workbook materials and programmed texts, as opposed to inflexible, large group resources, such as film and television. This change of emphasis seems to us to accord with present financial realities and with the current emphasis on individual, à la carte, rather than mass-produced table d'hôte, learning. The use of such resources is as capable as the use of mass media of freeing staff time for tutorial and small group contacts. The essential difference is that individualised learning resources reinforce seminar and tutorial teaching, whereas mass lectures (whether live or canned) demand personal teaching as a palliative for their impersonal approach.

50. In general, we should explore energetically alternatives to the traditional system in which most academic time was spent 'going through the course', and should set a high priority on small-group and tutorial teaching.

The Open University

51. The Open University has from the start been committed to an idea which is the very antithesis of an élitist concept. All who have the ability and motivation are to be encouraged to take whatever courses they choose for personal education, irrespective of their social utility. Vocational and non-vocational motives may frankly and inextricably be mingled in the making of these choices. There are no formal entrance qualifications. No subjects are to be luxuries which only the privileged take, though of course this educational justice may not be able to compensate for the injustices of earlier educational deprivations. This departure from the traditional idea has been accompanied by much experiment in the design of courses, materials and methods. These cannot but have a fruitful influence throughout higher education in challenging old assumptions and presenting new perspectives. The grandeur of the idea and the enthusiasm of those dedicated to it do not, however, dispose of some question-marks which must be set against some of its possible consequences. This is an essential area of development; but will the policy of admitting eighteen-year-olds become a temptingly cheap alternative to full-time higher education? How far can its unit-credits be acceptable in traditional institutions of higher education? Above all, what influence will its acceptance of a wide range of ability have on the selective entrance standards which are a foundation-stone of higher education as we have known it in the past? Will its lead towards a more comprehensive concept of higher education be followed? If so, should we welcome this? It will be essential both to keep an open mind on these questions and to watch the impact of the Open University on higher education in general carefully over the next ten years.

Higher education and other forms of experience

52. The worth of the sandwich course was an initial article of faith in the technological universities and the polytechnics, and we hope that still wider use can be made of it. Teacher education has always had its own kind of sandwich, as also has had training for social work. We should be looking more broadly at fruitful ways in which experience in the general life of the community can be incorporated into the structure of higher education. Three useful 'gaps' in schooling which could be so filled suggest themselves: those between school and higher education, between Dip. H.E. and degree work, and between first and higher degree. Much more investigation is needed into the variety of attractive and apparently desirable ways in which such periods could be spent. We shall need to map the choices and movements made by students during the major interstices within their formal education and to inquire into their effects upon the orientation and learning capabilities both of those who appear to have benefited from them and of those who appear to have been disadvantaged.

A Think Tank

53. What seems to us to be needed is the creation of a 'Think Tank' on higher education, with no executive power, which would supply fresh currents of thought, as well as evidence, for the use of whatever executive planning bodies there were — whether central or regional. Though we are impressed by the immense labours of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in the U.S.A. and the material of the highest quality it has supplied to policy-makers in its own country during these last six years, we do not imagine that an enterprise corresponding to it in this country would be feasible. Nor do we think that the Carnegie Commission itself, wide though its range of reflection on sociological, economic, administrative and structural issues has been, has perhaps added enough of the philosophic reflectiveness the times call for. The sort of 'Think Tank' we propose would be a small and unofficial body, consisting of perhaps 12 - 15 people, but its members would be men and women whose views, orthodox or unorthodox, would be likely to be listened to. They would be drawn from a diversity of parts of the higher education system and would serve for a period — several for two or three, several for four, years. They would be expected to make at least some of their thinking known, perhaps at regular intervals. Their remit would concern the purposes of higher education both utilitarian and less utilitarian; practical ways in which the system might further them; and particular issues on which a statement of view might be clarifying.

54. This body would have more of a necessary independence guaranteed to it if it was sponsored by a Foundation which would aid it with finance for its meetings and for secretarial services, though finance on a large scale would not we think be needed. The Foundation might indeed choose the members of the 'Think Tank' in somewhat the same way as the members of the Carnegie Commission were chosen. And these, according to Alan Pifer, the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 'were selected by the Foundation itself for their known ability, experience, judgement, objectivity and interest in higher education' and not as representatives of anything. But we would want a lower proportion of administrators and instead a philosopher or two, some younger people teaching the sciences, the technologies and the humanities, as well as some interested men and women, as they had, drawn from the national life.

APPENDIX I

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APPENDIX II

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(b) On the Liberal Education of the Technological Expert

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